

From the Desk of
James Wesley Stivers
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Rob Akerill
812 7th Street SE
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Dear Rob,

I want to thank you again, on behalf of me and my family, for your participation in Josiah's graduation. I am sorry to hear that you had trouble getting home and I regret it if the trip ended up being a hardship to you. We appreciate your personal sacrifice to come. I think it was a very positive experience for everyone who attended.

Although I don't remember the context of the conversation, some time ago, Kay asked Josiah what were some of the saddest moments of his life. The first thing he mentioned was when he lost a boyhood friend who died from a skateboard accident. That was a very sad thing because those two boys were close.

She asked him what the second saddest moment of his life was. And he said "when Rob Akerill had to leave Tensed."

That response surprised me because I thought that Josiah was the least affected of our children to what had happened. I hope you can appreciate the magnitude of what he said. It should reinforce in your mind the importance of what Jesus said concerning the obligations of pastors: they do not abandon their flocks (John 10:11-15).

Twenty-five years ago I learned that organized Christianity was a fraud. At the time, I was helping personal friends start voluntary Bible clubs in our city's high schools. We felt that a large number of young people were not getting a Christian witness. (You must remember this was many years before I began to adopt any of my more controversial views. I was just a kid who loved Jesus and wanted to save kids from going to hell.)

The city's clergy association publicly condemned my activity and local well-respected "Christian" attorneys threatened to sue me if I didn't stop. Needless to say, I was completely bewildered. I wondered how these people could profess to love the souls of men, yet prevent the spread of the Gospel at the same time.

I then realized that nothing had changed since the time Tyndale was burned at the stake for providing an English translation of the Bible. He did it without the blessing of the king. I evangelized without the blessing of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Through my four decades of involvement in churches, I have seen the same song and dance over and over again. It is what led Francis Schaeffer to write his book, "The Great Evangelical Disaster". All churches are the same: they are businesses, not communities of the faithful. Their love and commitment is a mile wide and an inch deep. They are well-decorated and charmed to get you in the door. After that, it's control. You are another recruit to keep the machinery going.

My daughter tells me that you have intentions to rejoin Village Missions. I told her that it wasn't possible because you told me more than once that you were done with Village Missions. I told her and my children that whatever it is that you are doing, it probably has something to do with the restoration process you agreed to when you left Tensed.

But then, Jerry Whalen told me recently that you are collecting sponsors to take a new position in the organization. I told him that I didn't believe it. If it is true, it is a strange game you are playing.

What troubles me more than these rumors is the report that Village Missions has had you under surveillance, that you are under restrictions as to who you can or cannot see, and that in particular, you cannot be in contact with anyone here without permission. If that is the case, I want to first thank you again for coming to my son's graduation and for allowing my daughter to continue her friendship with your daughters. But I also must warn you – if this is true – that any religious organization which attempts to control the personal lives of its members is a cult by definition. I don't care if they wear an evangelical label.

There is a thing unmanly in someone who will submit to a religious group to tell him what he can or cannot eat, what he can or cannot read, who he can see, where he can live, etc., etc. Adult men make these kinds of decisions for themselves. This Christian Republic was founded upon the self-government of the Christian man, and it is a reflection of the socialism of our times that religious organizations think they have the God-ordained right to go beyond teaching and setting an example and, instead, attempt to use control mechanisms to micro-manage people's lives. If this is the policy of Village Missions, then it is a corrupt organization.

You and Jerry Whalen are the only ones I have told concerning my legal options under consideration. Until now, the letters I have done have been sent to find out what is in people's hearts and to make them choose sides. I hope that these reports about you are not true. If they are, then, regrettably, we will be on opposite sides of the battle.

In Christ,

James

P.S. Enclosed is the picture I promised. I'm sorry it's so blurry. I haven't learned how to print good pictures yet.